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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [MCAP](#) [SU](#)  
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN SUDAN: TENSIONS OVER CONSTRUCTION OF  
INTERIM SPLA HEADQUARTERS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Approximately 20 men armed with machetes, knives, and other weapons stormed the construction site of the new interim general headquarters for the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) November 11 and threatened expatriate staff. An SPLA soldier on site responded and called in reinforcements, who repulsed the group. One intruder was injured in the incident, the latest in a series involving the SPLA and local villagers claiming rights to the land. The headquarters is being built with USG funds, through the prime contractor DynCorp and various sub-contractors. End Summary.

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Armed Intruders  
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¶2. (SBU) The trouble began around 10:00 a.m. local time on an otherwise quiet Saturday. A ragtag group of approximately 20 men entered the large SPLA construction site, brandishing machetes, knives, and clubs. The group identified two Lebanese engineers at the site, told them to stop working, and threatened them with death if they "dug another hole." The engineers are employed by the Millennium Group, sub-contractors to the U.S.-based DynCorp. DynCorp is constructing the headquarters with USG funding, part of a larger program to assist in the transformation of the SPLA from a guerilla army to a more professional force.

¶3. (SBU) After being threatened, the Lebanese engineers alerted the single SPLA soldier on site, who attempted to discuss the situation with the intruders. He also managed to summon several other SPLA soldiers from a nearby site. Once the SPLA was present in greater numbers, they forcefully directed the intruders to depart. One SPLA soldier struck an intruder on the head with the blunt side of a machete. The intruders departed with no further injuries.

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Response  
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¶4. (SBU) ConGen staff contacted SPLA Chief of Staff Gen. Oyai Deng by mid-afternoon November 11, immediately upon learning of the incident. We stressed that the SPLA must provide adequate security at the site and must resolve its differences with the local population and the villagers' political leaders and allies. Deng said he would inform GoSS Vice President Riek Machar of the incident immediately. He also promised to consult further with Central Equatoria State Governor Clement Wani and to dispatch an SPLA delegation to meet with community leaders. SPLA officials and a local government leader conferred with villagers later in the day on November 11 and made plans for follow-up consultations on November 13.

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Background  
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¶5. (SBU) The dispute is one of several in the Juba area between the local population and various land claimants, including the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS). ConGen staff and the ARSO visited the SPLA site November 9. Work was proceeding smoothly. Four SPLA soldiers were present at the site to provide security. Three others were absent fetching water and/or obtaining food. We underscored to the soldiers the importance of their mission. We also encouraged construction personnel to move quickly to refurbish a wellhead damaged in an earlier incident of community violence, so that there would be fewer reasons for SPLA soldiers to be absent from the site.

¶6. (SBU) In the previous incident, on October 14, armed intruders did tens of thousands of dollars worth of damage to electrical equipment, fence posts, a wellhead, and other equipment at the site. Subsequent to the incident, the SPLA arrested three persons, including at least one community leader. Custody of the detainees was later transferred to the police after the intervention of Governor Wani. At least two of the detainees are now said to have been released.

¶7. (SBU) Wani invited ConGen staff to view an alternative site for the construction on October 29. We accepted the invitation and viewed the site, approximately two kilometers distant from the current construction. The current site is bordered by a small village of perhaps 20 households. The villagers are mainly ethnic Bari. In addition, there are three homesteads of about a dozen ethnic Mundari still living on the current construction site. According to Wani, the SPLA has never visited the alternative site, and never

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consulted with him about the location of the interim headquarters. The SPLA claim they consulted with Wani and others at various levels of government, including the local community, and that the site was accepted.

¶8. (SBU) ConGen urged Wani to consult directly with the SPLA on all issues concerning the construction and ensure that all stakeholders, including the SPLA, discuss the construction project further with local residents. We later visited Gen. Deng to urge him to talk directly to Wani, and to reinforce SPLA efforts to reach out to the local community. We have pointed out to all concerned that the site was selected after a lengthy process and that significant funds have already been expended to commence construction.

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Next Steps  
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¶9. (SBU) DynCorp personnel and their subcontractors are prepared to resume operations at the site, but only on the condition that the SPLA maintain a force of no fewer than seven armed soldiers at the site at all times. DynCorp will also erect a sign identifying the site as intended for the SPLA headquarters, rather than a private construction project. ConGen staff has underscored the importance of adequate security with the SPLA and stated that work cannot continue at the site if adequate security cannot be provided. A further evaluation of the security posture should be undertaken after SPLA and GoSS representatives hold further consultations with the affected community and its leaders. There are currently approximately 20 SPLA soldiers on the site providing security.

HUME